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Flashy Prosecutor

Jim Garrison

Special to The New York Times

NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 24 —Jim Garrison's style is the "big splash," that of the big man who does things in a big way. And the flamboyant approach of the 6-foot 6-inch District Attorney to the job of enforcing the law in Orleans Parish (County) usually is accompanied by a rash of headlines.

Man in the News

He has battled the businessmen of Bourbon Street, the garish strip of honky tonks and French restaurants that draw thousands of tourists to New Orleans. He once took on eight judges simultaneously in a running legal and verbal battle.

After these and other Garrison forays few here were surprised that he decided to tackle the Warren Commission and its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy alone and without being a part of a conspiracy.

Associated Press

Witty and enterprising

Pales by Comparison

Even Mr. Garrison's flamboyance pales by comparison with some of the antics that have characterized Louisiana politics in the past. He has yet to match the late Gov. Earl K. Long, self-styled "last of the red-hot poppas." Nor has he equaled in showmanship the Governor's late brother, Senator Huey P. Long, the "kingfish" of "every man a king" fame.

Until five years ago, Mr. Garrison was a relatively obscure assistant city attorney, best known for his habit of bar hopping along Bourbon Street, frequently in a white dinner jacket. Then suddenly he resigned with a headline-making attack on Mayor Victor Hugo Schiro, whom he accused of failing to enforce vigorously the city's laws, and leaped into the race for district attorney against the incumbent, Richard Dowling.

A fiercely independent "reform" candidate, Mr. Garrison, despite his big figure, created a public image for himself as a David against Goliath, a Sir Galahad taking on machine politics single-handedly. But he did it with wit. It was hard even for his opponents not to laugh when he labeled Mr. Dowling as "the great emancipator—he let everybody go free."

Mr. Garrison, married and the father of three children, had the "common touch. Although he was named James C. Garrison at his birth in Dennison, Iowa, on Nov. 20, 1921, he insisted through World War II as a fighter pilot and his school years at Tulane University that he simply be called Jim. Finally, he tok legal action to make Jim his formal name.

He also managed to keep a ruggedly healthy look, practicing isometrics, but not to the extent of neglecting books. He often reads until 3 or 4 A.M.—lately in books that deal with the Kennedy assassination—at his home on Owens Boulevard in a new two-story New Orleans-style home in an area about two miles from Lake Pontehartrain where house prices range from $40,000 to $75,000.

Despite all this, Mr. Garrison was decidely an underdog in the 1962 district attorney's campaign. However, the "big splash" technique put him over. He hoarded his campaign money until the last, then saturated the television screens here with commercials during the last 24 hours of the campaign.

Mr. Garrison quickly proved that Garrison the campaigner was a dull, sedentary type, compared with Garrison the district attorney. He convicted men on charges that had been dropped under his predecessor, and established a record of never losing a murder case. He also began a clean-up of what he said was prostitution and blackmail on Bourbon Street. And when Mayor Schiro, not to mention many of the city's businessmen, showed little enthusiasm, he buried them in literary and historical allusions.

When eight city judges tried to cut off funds for Mr. Garrison's investigation, he compared them to the "sacred cows of India . . . rushing to the defense of their institutions." The judges sued, succeeded in getting Mr. Garrison fined $1,000 for defamation of character, but Mr. Garrison appealed to the United States Supreme Court and won.

Angry at Newspaper

Mr. Garrison claims jurisdiction in the Kennedy assassination investigation because Oswald once lived in New Orleans. When The New Orleans States-Item said last week that he had spent $8,000 on the inquiry, he became angry.

Although Mr. Garrison had previously refused to say anything "on the record" about his investigation, he announced Saturday that he planned to make arrests for what he said was a "conspiracy" and a "plot" that culminated in President Kennedy's death. He seemed taken aback at the worldwide interest in his charges.

Some local political observers are convinced that Mr. Garrison, who was instrumental in electing Gov. John J. McKeithen, is eyeing a Senate seat or possibly even the Vice-Presidency some day.